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C O N F I D E N T I A L SARAJEVO 00060

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DEPT FOR EUR (DICARLO), D (SMITH), P (BAME), EUR/SCE (HOH,  
SAINZ, FOOKS), S/WCI, AND EUR/RPM (BROTZEN), NSC FOR BRAUN,  
USNIC FOR WIGHMAN AND MCLANE, OSD FOR JONES, USNATO FOR  
REID, NDERWOORD, SHAFFER

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: TIHIC LOOKS TO CIKOTIC AS NEXT DEFENSE  
MINISTER

REF: SARAJEVO 36

Classified By: CDA Judith Cefkin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Party of Democratic Action (SDA) Chairman Suljeman Tihic confirmed to CDA and NATO POLAD that he would nominate former general Selmo Cikotic to be Bosnia's next minister of defense, considering that the USG and NATO had no objection to his appointment. Tihic said he may be able to submit the name of the apolitical, technocrat Cikotic to Prime Minister Spiric by the end of the week. The probable appointment of Cikotic is a welcome development, and the best possible option among Bosniaks rumored to be in line for the post. Tihic also solicited Embassy counsel on his nomination for minister of security, saying he sought a "honest and courageous" minister free of "political baggage."

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TIHIC TO TAP CIKOTIC FOR MOD  
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¶2. (C) CDA and NATO POLAD met with Party of Democratic Action (SDA) Chairman Suljeman Tihic January 11 to discuss his party's nomination for the post of Minister of Defense. CDA and POLAD informed Tihic that the USG and NATO had no objections to the appointment of the former general and BiH defense attache in Washington Selmo Cikotic, and any previous concerns over his wartime record had been positively resolved. Both CDA and POLAD noted that Cikotic was well-respected within international circles as a highly competent, knowledgeable technocrat, well-suited to lead the defense reform agenda forward. CDA raised the issue that under Article 18 of the Law on Defense, Cikotic would be unable to assume the position of minister until May, three years after his official retirement from the Armed Forces. Both CDA and POLAD voiced their hope that a pragmatic solution could be reached that would allow Cikotic to assume his duties at that time, possibly by keeping current Minister Radovanovic in his post in a technical mandate.

¶3. (C) Tihic expressed his gratitude at the support of the Embassy and NATO, and said that Cikotic had majority support within SDA and would be nominated for the post. He stated that he had wanted to make sure that Cikotic would be an acceptable candidate for the United States and NATO because

"if he cannot cooperate with the United States and NATO, he cannot be good for BiH." Tihic asserted that the matter was now closed, and that he was not considering any other candidates. Although he might get some push back from others in SDA, he did not foresee a serious challenge to Cikotic's candidacy. Tihic claimed that Cikotic should not be a controversial candidate for Croats and Serbs, since all accusations about his wartime activities were found to be without merit (Note. Cikotic is not a Bosniak nationalist. His wife is a Bosnian-Serb and he is known to visit her relatives in Banja Luka often. End note.) Tihic was to meet with Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) Chairman Dragan Covic in the afternoon to preview the appointment with him and ask for his support. As for the questions over Cikotic's ineligibility for the post until May, Tihic did not seem overly concerned with the matter, and expressed the opinion that the issue could be easily resolved.

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ALSO LOOKING FOR A GOOD CHOICE FOR SECURITY  
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¶4. (C) Tihic said he was still in a quandary over his nomination for Minister of Security (reftel). Tihic said he was not looking for "a typical politician who would be burdened by political things" but someone apolitical, "honest and courageous" who could work well with the international community and play a constructive role in the police reform process. Tihic noted that he had a list of 20 people from SDA who wanted the job, but none of them were under consideration as they did not meet his desired criteria. Tihic laughingly bemoaned the fact that he had to make the hardest decisions for the Council of Ministers, and again expressed his strong belief that both the defense and security positions should be filled by apolitical technocrats.

¶5. (C) CDA and POLAD agreed with Tihic that the security position was also of prime importance and commended him on taking his responsibility in the matter very seriously. CDA and POLAD promised to give this matter some thought, in consultation with other security experts. CDA asked Tihic when he anticipated presenting his nominations to PM-designate Spiric, noting that Spiric had requested them by the end of the week. He had told Spiric that he would not be able to make the Friday deadline on at least the security nomination. Tihic added that he may go ahead and put Cikotic's name forward, but that it might be best to wait until both nominations were ready.

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COMMENT: TIHIC MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES  
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¶6. (C) We are pleased that Tihic appears to genuinely seek candidates well-qualified for the job, and seems strong enough within SDA to consider candidates aside from party insiders. There exists widespread consensus between us, NATO, and OHR that getting Cikotic as defense minister was the best possible outcome under the circumstances, as Cikotic has extensive international experience and played a crucial role in the development of defense reform. He had been a very good Embassy contact and can be expected to be a strong proponent of increasing integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures.  
CEFKIN